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COTTON AND THE GENERAL AGRICULTURAL OUTLOOK—DISCUSSION

GEORGE K. HOLMES: The makeshift agricultural system that forced itself upon cotton planters after the Civil War, although a necessity at that time, had various features that grew to be real burdens upon the planters, and the system was too uneconomical to last. Among these burdens were the tenant system, the crop lien, the enforced sale of cotton by the planters as soon as ginned, the want of rotation and diversification of crops, and a too large reliance upon commercial fertilizers. Under this system the planters' purchases and sales become mere transactions in barter, in which cotton was exchanged for supplies for farm and family. It is this barter, in which bookkeeping takes the place of money, that has made money so scarce among Southern agriculturists, for money does not go where it is not used.

The negro has been, and, in a less degree, still is essential to Southern agriculture, but he has dominated the character of agriculture, to its disadvantage. Ex-Governor Northen of Georgia said, in a recent address: "We have not diversified our crops, because the negro has not been willing to diversify. We have not used improved machinery on our farms, thereby economizing expenses, because the negro is not willing to use such implements. We have not improved our soil because the negro is not willing to grow crops to be incorporated into the lands, nor leave his cotton seed to be returned to the fields that he has denuded of humus and all possible traces of fertility. Because he is unwilling to handle heavy plows, we have permitted him to scratch the land with his scooter just deep enough to allow all

the soil to be washed from the surface, leaving our fields practically barren and wasted. We have not raised stock on the farm because the negro is cruelly inhuman and starves the work animals we put into his hands for his personal support. We have accepted his thriftless and destructive methods simply because under our present system we have not been able to help ourselves. If this be true, our present system in this relation is absolutely ruinous and it will not invite the residence of intelligent settlers from the outside."

With hardly an exception, the Southern farmers whose letters I have read testify that the deterioration of negro labor has become so accelerated as to be almost perceptible year by year. The old economic deduction that free labor is more efficient than slave labor is a gigantic fallacy as far as experience in the South is concerned.

Within the last few years, the negro has evidenced a marked tendency to migrate from the plantation to town and city; to railroad, mill, and lumbering camp; and to diffuse himself throughout the North. The reason for this is that the plantation negro has so deteriorated for the practical purposes of getting a living that he is finding the conditions on the upland too severe for him, and so is migrating to places where conditions are easier. In Virginia he has very largely disappeared from the farm outside of the southeastern part of the state. In consequence of this, the average cultivated farm area is limited to what can be cultivated by one family with a little extra help, just as it is in the North, and for the same reason. The migrations of agricultural negroes to the cities and to the North have gradually forced the line of small cultivation southward through Virginia to North Carolina.

White labor is supplementing negro labor in the raising of cotton with an increasing fraction. From census statistics it is estimated that approximately 40 per cent of the cotton field labor is white, and that in Texas it is fully 60 per cent. When the old Southern cotton plantation loses the negro, it will then be face to face with problems of far reaching consequences. Forces which I have not time to discuss seem to be at work to diminish the reliance of the cotton planter and Southern farmer upon negro labor. This will jeopardize the present tenant system, threaten the disruption of the large plantations, and increase the rotation and diversification of crops. The Southwest has received white labor from the outside because of its new and cheap land, but the old South will have its day in the influx of white labor, because the time is at hand when it should be seen that the cheapest agricultural land in this country is the old exhausted land of the South, with its low prices and enormous possibilities under intelligent management in the utilization of green manures, the rotation of crops, the diversification of production and wise specialization.

Railroads can help the agricultural South immensely, if they will; some of them have done so. Conspicuous examples have been set by railroads running from the Southwest to St. Louis and Chicago, and by the railroads running up the Mississippi Valley and the Atlantic coast; but among the smaller railroads and branches of the larger ones are many that so adjust their freight rates that they bring goods to the farmer, but market few products for him. Many an agricultural community in the South suffers under and because of this condition. The complaint is that freight rates for the transportation of hardly more than a score of miles

are so high that they absorb perhaps the entire selling price of farm products. A railroad that sets out to make business for itself, such as the Southern Pacific, is an everlasting example to these unprogressive railroads. I understand that through the efforts of the industrial agents of that road 70,000 families have immigrated within the past ten years to the region along its line, largely to southeastern Texas and southwestern Louisiana. Some of our states have less than this number of families. A remarkable fact in connection with this immigration is that these families come mostly from the North—from such states as Illinois and Indiana.

The cotton planter and the general farmer in the South have been in purgatory, but they are coming out. The agricultural development of the South since the census of 1890 is very marked and this in spite of a comparison with the tremendous agricultural development of the North Central states. The South, which had been backward in its corn production for many years preceding 1890, finds itself since that time with its fraction of the national production of corn increasing faster than that of any other section. The same is true with regard to wheat, sweet potatoes, cane and sorghum syrup; and to these may be added tobacco, farm-made butter, horses, mules and swine. The South occupies a second place in the rate of increase of production in comparison with other sections, in buckwheat, hay, apple and peach trees, cattle other than milch cows, and farm-made cheese. Of course, if rates of progress for the different states were examined, it would be found that the rate of progressive production in the South is considerably localized, more particularly in the southwest than elsewhere; but the older part of the South is

by no means out of the race, although it has no virgin soil to exploit. The South is making great progress, too, in enriching the soil by means of leguminous crops, such as cowpeas, thereby supplying nitrogen and humus and breaking away from the sole dependence upon commercial fertilizers. Notwithstanding the persistence of cotton as the one crop of the plantation, agriculture is diversifying in the South in the direction of fruits and vegetables, live stock, dairying, tobacco, rice, and cane and sorghum syrup.

Evidences of a new life in agriculture appear in numerous places. A dozen years ago, Southern farmers made their first noticeable attempt to produce their own supplies, and since that time progress has been made in this direction to an extent sufficient to be evident in the census of 1900. A large independence in this respect was enjoyed by plantations half a century ago; they are now returning in a measure to that independence. There is no part of this country where the farmer can become so independent as he can in the South—independent in the production of that numerous class of products comprehended within farm and family supplies.

A word in conclusion in regard to the future of cotton. The plans of British, French and German cotton manufacturers to have cotton raised in Africa and perhaps South America in quantities sufficient to become a large export crop, seem plausible enough if we ignore one essential factor. The conditions of climate and soil are ideal and cotton grows perhaps spontaneously in the regions toward which their attention is directed, but they have overlooked the necessity for men who will engage in arduous and continuous labor. The reliance upon labor in Africa must be upon native negro labor, and how

slender this reliance is for such an undertaking as cotton raising, should be apparent to any one who has read the numerous accounts of white men who have come in contact with it. The Transvaal Labor Commission, appointed to examine a critical state of affairs on account of the scarcity of labor, has just reported that the demand for native labor for agriculture in the Transvaal is largely in excess of the present supply and that there is no adequate supply of labor either in southern or central Africa to meet the requirements of agriculture, mining, and the various industries in that colony. A plan to place the negroes under a system of peonage has been earnestly advocated within a year in South Africa and England. Cotton could be produced in large quantities in Brazil if labor were at hand for the purpose, but in that desert of laziness the production of surplus cotton is out of the question, although all other requirements are present and ideal. It need not be expected that Egypt and India will increase their production of cotton faster than is necessary to maintain their present relative position in the world's supply. Their labor has been on trial in this direction long enough to demonstrate what it can not do.

On the other hand, the cotton belt of this country has by no means reached its limit of production. Under a rotation of crops, leguminous manures, and an improvement of seed, the present cotton crop of this country can be doubled upon the present number of planted acres. If the boll weevil does not prevent, the South will continue to supply more than two-thirds of the world's cotton, and the welfare of the cotton producer demands that the prices shall be high.

THOMAS N. CARVER : Does the rotation of crops check the boll weevil ?

D. F. HOUSTON : The only thing I know of is to stop

planting cotton. I have here some specimens. I doubt if stopping the planting of cotton for four or five years would stop the boll weevil.

WILLIAM C. STUBBS : I beg to say a few words about the boll weevil. It can live only on the cotton plant. If you destroy the cotton plant you will destroy this pest. The question will be considered at a meeting to be held in New Orleans some time during the winter. A bill is to be introduced in Washington, and we are going to fight the weevil heartily. We are going to fight it on the lines of the railroads and streams, to keep it out of Louisiana. We have the assertion of Prof. Wilson that the treasury of the United States is the best money chest in the world, and yet if a man had all of that money there would not be enough to fight the boll weevil. We will try to hold him in check.

The insect is not a new thing. During our southern war, Cuba tried to raise cotton, yet there were two or three wild cotton plants producing boll weevils as fast as it was raised. That effort was a failure. Since then it has been introduced all over the parishes where cotton is raised. The boll weevil is all over Mexico, except in a single state which is quarantined by a hundred miles of non-cotton country.

We have to fight to keep it from spreading. Texas has special commissions. One of the speakers said that 60 per cent of the cotton growers are white men, while in Louisiana 60 per cent are negroes. We have all the facilities in the world for flooding the state. I can go from here to fifty-five parishes by water. But we don't want to run the risk of flooding him out of Louisiana. I believe this to be the most serious danger that ever confronted the cotton industry. If it is permitted to ravage our state our cotton industry will be reduced to 8,000,000 bales.